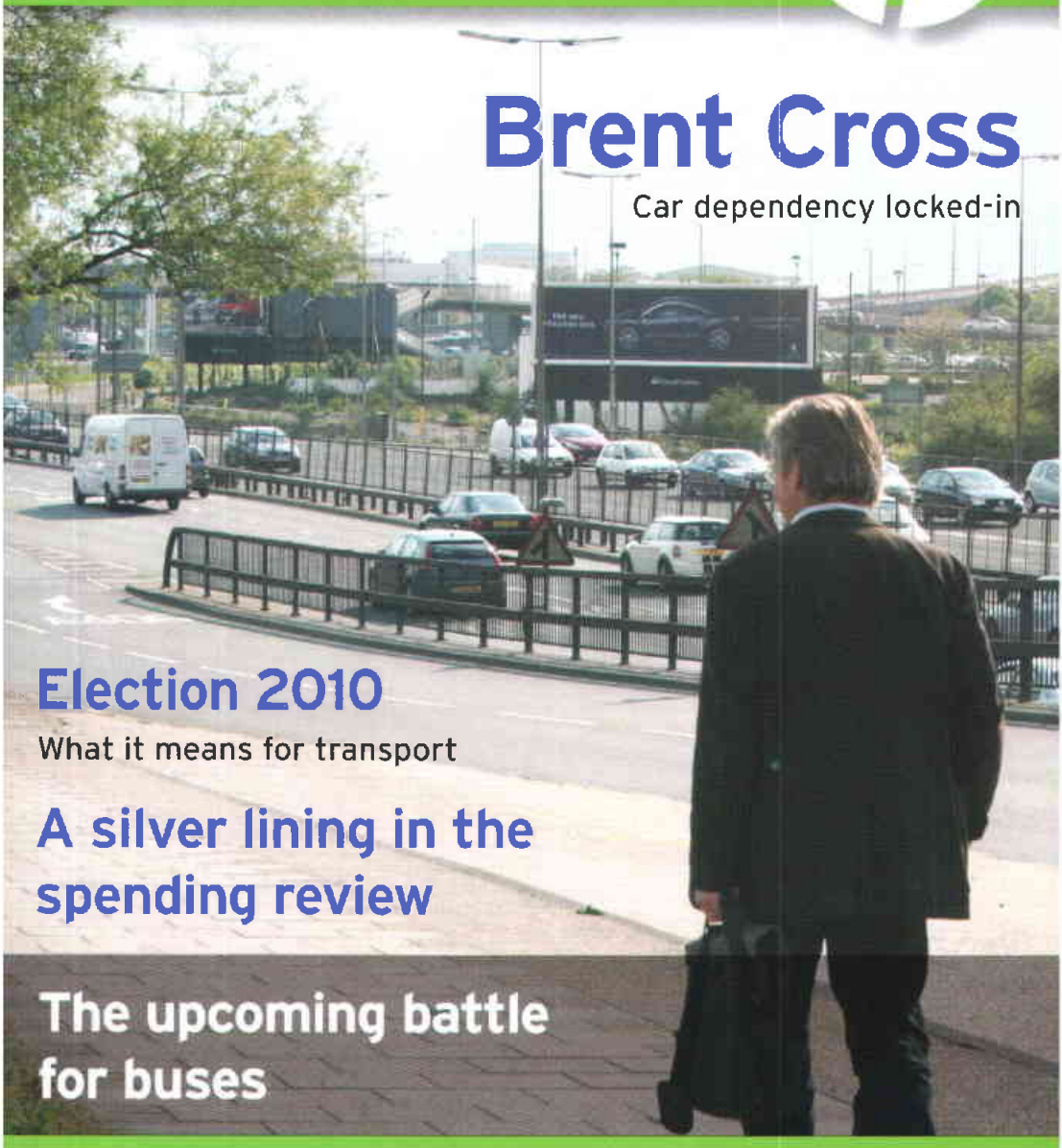
June 2010

Impact

The work of Campaign for Better Transport



Brent Cross

Car dependency locked-in

Election 2010

What it means for transport

A silver lining in the spending review

The upcoming battle for buses

PLUS • High speed rail faces tough questions • Good news for trams

Campaign for Better Transport

Right: Executive Director Stephen Joseph seen at a recent presentation to transport authorities.

Spending cuts: crisis or opportunity

Dear friend,

As the dust settles on the most tumultuous election in memory, we're left with the near certainty of deep and painful spending cuts, of the type that could shape transport, and transport policy, for years.

On the one hand, cuts threaten sustainable transport. We can expect renewed pressure for cuts in "lightly used" rail lines – ignoring the fact that savings from these cuts are illusory – while buses and road maintenance are also under threat. On the other, there are opportunities. Expensive road schemes, like the £1.3bn Cambridgeshire A14 project, should face tougher scrutiny. Meanwhile, new evidence on "smarter choices" (travel plans, individual marketing, cycling, etc.) shows we can change travel behaviour and tackle transport problems quickly with relatively limited funds.

We are gearing up for a fight for rail and buses, and are already working with other groups to look at ways of protecting and promoting cycling spending. Our advance work suggests we're ahead of the curve in promoting smart strategies to decision-makers. So this is a battle we're prepared for, but we will need to bring tenacity and resources to bear.

You'll see we've responded to reader suggestions in making some changes to Impact; please let us know what you think of them. And as ever, thank you for your continuing and generous support – it is much appreciated and more necessary now than ever.

Stephen Joseph

Executive Director

Cover image by Jack Haskew

Ensuring best results

As the post-election spending review gathers pace, it is with a degree of urgency that Campaign for Better Transport has begun advocating smart budget choices that give priority to sustainable transport. Here we walk through the battles ahead, and how we plan to fight them.

Throughout, we focus on the need to stay within our carbon budget as well as the financial budget. We suggest a principled approach regarding where to cut and where to spend.

Principles

We recommend avoiding across-the-board cuts which would hinder achievement of the new Government's priorities on transport and indeed the economy.

We recommend policies that would:

- reduce the need to travel
- maintain and refurbish our transport infrastructure
- spend on projects where fewer funds have produced the best returns
- defer schemes that aren't affordable
- cut spending that does not promote carbon and travel reduction goals
- change DfT's appraisal system to fairly weight carbon reduction.

Relative price

Budget decisions must address the worsening relative price of public transport in comparison with private motor transport or aviation. Whilst the cost of motoring has fallen by 14% in real terms since 1997, the cost of travelling by rail has increased by 13% and by 24% for bus and coach. This trend must be

Despite huge popularity and importance, bus services may be vulnerable under the spending review.

2 minute ACTION

The Government wants to give train companies a financial incentive to cut services. What's more, it isn't properly consulting with passengers. Tell the Government that isn't good enough, by visiting the Take Action section of our website, at www.bettertransport.org.uk.

New high speed trains are a Government priority: but will they reduce carbon emissions?

reversed to meet our carbon and traffic reduction goals.

Rail spending

We are urging Ministers to reduce fares so that prices are simple, transparent, fair – and cheaper. New evidence has again confirmed that low cost train tickets can increase ridership.

We are also working to:

- maintain strong passenger-focussed specifications in train franchise agreements
- continue investment in new trains to tackle overcrowding
- continue enhancements of the existing network with new services and stations to satisfy growth
- promote the electrification of the rail network, and line reopenings
- keep rail freight capital and revenue grants

High speed trains

High speed rail (HSR) could deliver significant reductions in CO_2 but not under current plans. We've detailed the key hurdles faced before any HSR plan would get a green stamp of approval. Briefly, we ask whether HSR will:

- take funding from existing transport?
- cut carbon emissions?
- result in regeneration outside London?
- protect the local environment?
- cost a lot to use it?

Revenue opportunities

There are significant revenue opportunities including on lorry road user charging and the commitment to a per plane tax. We continue to push for fuel tax on domestic aviation and on those business flights which are currently exempt.

Buses

The battle for buses could shape up to be one of the central campaigns of the coming months, as detailed in Cat Hobbs' piece (page 10).

Local funding

We strongly supported the Conservatives' carbon reduction fund, which could also to tackle congestion, improve health and enhance local environments. Whatever finally emerges, we will push for sufficient funding to achieve policy aims, incentivise cooperation between local authorities, and deliver outcomes across health, communities & local government, and transport.

The spending review now underway may be a unique chance to shape transport policy for years to come. We appreciate your being a part of it with us. ■

Find out more

You can read more about our policy priorities and find an archive of research and press clippings at www.bettertransport.org.uk

Local transport victory

Secrets of our success

A victory for sustainable development is on show in Leighton Buzzard

The recent launch of a new bus service in Bedfordshire wasn't just the extension of local services. It was the start of something extraordinary: a world-leading example of sustainable development.

Credit for the Leighton Buzzard scheme rests squarely with the relentless efforts of local campaigner Victoria Harvey (profiled on our website), but we were pleased to lend support and guidance throughout. We also lobbied the Government to fund the work as an exemplar project.

"We wanted two things for the estate," Harvey said. "Transport links should be good enough that families don't need a second car. And it should be easier for residents to get to the town centre and shop locally than to drive to an out-of-town shopping centre."

The result is a service that links a brand-new housing development to the town and station, so when the first people move in they'll have public transport links already in place. Not only that: they will also have futuristic screens in their kitchens telling them when the next bus is due! There will also be great cycling facilities and a new, super-local community hall, school and shops, reducing the need for people to drive.

Victoria Harvey and Stephen Joseph (second from right) celebrate the launch with Leighton Buzzard councilors and transport officials.

All in, Victoria helped bring to fruition a comprehensive vision of sustainable development. Planners and campaigners throughout Britain now have evidence of what "better" looks like.

Victoria is not just a sustainable transport champion. She has also convincingly demonstrated the power of local community efforts to shape transport, instead of allowing bad transport choices to shape our communities. Hers is an example to follow. ■

Missed Opportunities

Campaigner Richard Bourn discusses his recent research.

The Brent Cross Shopping Centre and the Battersea Power Station are landmarks familiar to all London residents. They are also designated development "Opportunity Areas", and final decisions on planning applications for both sites are due shortly. We held the plans up to hard scrutiny.

The resulting report, *Missed Opportunity Areas*, measures the proposals against the principles of the *The Masterplanning Checklist for Sustainable Transport in New Developments*. In the year since we published the Checklist, it has grown a reputation as an industry reference for planning principles to enable less car-dependent development.

Both these Opportunity Areas present development potential so substantial that they could shape the transport and environment conditions not just of their own surroundings but of a whole London sub-region for the foreseeable future. They could meet 21st century transport needs within the development sites while contributing to the improvement of transport conditions in the surrounding areas. Disappointingly, the current proposals do neither.

Richard Bourn discusses the development plans with local campaigners and councilors at Brent Cross.

Brent Cross

The scale of the land identified for development at Brent Cross is vast. Yet the challenges posed to satisfy land use and transport needs have not been met. Plans for Brent Cross would double the shopping centre and include 7,500 new homes. But they would also create 20,000 parking spaces an estimated 29,000 additional car trips daily.

No new public transport has been proposed, and no attempt has been

made to pattern land use in ways that promote sustainable transport. The developers baldly claim a huge shift to public transport, walking and cycling, but do not say how this will be achieved.

Instead the plans make cars the main mode of access. The hugely enlarged shopping centre would depend on a large catchment area and a predominantly car-based clientele, adding to congestion and traffic over a wide area.

Battersea Power Station

There is more merit in the proposals for Battersea Power Station, which are underpinned by a planned extension of an Underground line. But here too, 3,250 parking spaces are planned, and the development will be a traffic magnet built on acres of car parking.

In central London, the emphasis should be on walking and cycling routes and providing local amenities both for the new development and for existing communities.

A pedestrian and cyclist bridge across the river to Pimlico and the rest of central London is an obvious but missing element. Links between existing communities and the river should be there but are not. Instead a riverside site in central London is to be used to accommodate a massive car park and retail parts of the development are designed to attract shoppers from as far way as (you guessed it) Brent Cross and Kingston.

Brent Cross plans would lock-in car dependency

Given its location and public transport options, the Battersea site is an opportunity to create a largely car-free development. As it stands it is another missed opportunity.

Opportunities too costly to miss

Climate change and the need for healthier, more active travel contribute to a new resolve to overcome traffic domination and meet higher standards of urban design. Places such as Freiburg show how to create highly attractive and desirable developments that are largely car-free and where most travel is on foot, bike or public transport. Battersea and Brent Cross could seek to emulate these, but instead have opted for the traditional car-based deserts that have laid waste to our cities and suburbs. Londoners deserve a higher standard.

You can find the entire report on our website, www.bettertransport.org.uk ■

2 minute ACTION

Tell the new Secretary of State to hold a public inquiry into the terrible development plans for Brent Cross by visiting the Take Action section of our website, at www.bettertransport.org.uk

Field notes

A selection of recent progress reported by Richard Hebditch, our campaigns director.

the NUMBERS game

82

the number of MPs in the new Parliament that have joined our call for a review of train fares regulation.

City traffic planning

We've frequently called on the Government to help cities to reduce traffic. In March, the Government responded by launching an Urban Challenge Fund for transport.

The plan contained some great ideas: improvements for bus services, support to promote "smarter choices", and to encourage walking and cycling. In addition, civil servants at the launch were promoting traffic reduction, and reallocation of road space to walking, cycling and buses.

Missing from the launch were funding details. However, the Conservatives' Carbon Reduction Plan is broadly similar, and we've welcomed that initiative.

Planes

The court's ruling on Heathrow's third runway was certainly one to cheer, and not just because it virtually guaranteed the runway would never be built (scrapping the plan was among the first announcements of the new Government, along with a commitment not to back new runways at Stansted and Gatwick).

Even more importantly, the judge found that the UK's aviation policy had to take account of the 2008 Climate Change Act. This spells the end of massive aviation expansion, which is simply incompatible with carbon reduction.

We also wrote to the Chancellor suggesting he target business jets, as some of these pay no tax at all on fuel or passengers. The new Government has backed per-plane taxes to replace the Airline Passenger Duty (a big improvement) and we'll scrutinise the plan for business jet loopholes.

High Speed Rail

The Government announced its high speed rail plan in March. Our advance press briefing that set out the issues was widely quoted. We also co-ordinated a meeting of environmental groups with the Conservatives and organised a follow-up letter.

Our position is that high speed rail must be about switching people from road and air to rail, rather than simply generating more travel, and that it must come with associated policies on planning, taxation and pricing. Funding for high speed lines also must not be at the expense of existing public transport.

Land Use Planning

Persuaded in part by our Masterplanning Checklist for land use, the Committee on Climate Change adopted our recommendations. The Government responded by agreeing to issue new planning policy on climate change, giving higher priority to sustainable transport. This is now enshrined as a commitment by the Department of Communities and Local Government.

We also continued our work with the St Albans quality network partnership, to demonstrate ways in which public transport services can be planned across a whole area. The scheme received Kickstart funding (to provide start-up funding for bus plans), along with funding from the East of England Development Agency. Other places are now pursuing joint partnership deals: in Oxford, Nottingham and Walsall the local authorities and bus operators have agreed greener bus networks. All this as the direct result of changes we secured in competition law.

Smarter Choices

Two DfT projects, Sustainable Travel Towns and Cycling Demonstration Towns, reported back in February, with overwhelming results. Both provided evidence that travel behaviour can be changed, and that combinations of measures can cut car use and get more people cycling and using buses. Both support policy positions we've been advocating for years.

We lobbied the Government to maintain its funding commitments for bus Kickstart schemes. The result was that Kickstart funding was secured, though less than promised.

Trams got a boost from our success convincing an all-party committee to level the playing field.

Trams

Trams are hugely popular and get people out of cars. But there aren't enough of them, because Government policy unfairly disadvantages trams compared to roads and buses. One of the big costs is in moving utilities (water, gas mains, sewers, etc.) to make way for the new project. Under Government rules, tram schemes have to pay much more of this cost than road schemes do.

In February, an all party parliamentary inquiry on light rail supported our proposals to level the playing field between trams and road schemes. We'll follow this up in the new Parliament. ■

20 minute ACTION

Let us know if you'd like to distribute Cut Fares postcards one morning at your local train station: communications@bettertransport.org.uk or 020 7566 6483.

Campaigner Report:

Diversion Ahead

Campaigner Richard George says there's a silver lining to spending cuts.

Sometimes good news comes wrapped in rather unnerving packaging. While colleagues of mine are dreading the inevitable cuts in public spending – and rightly so, give the risk to public transport services – the impact on the Government's road building programme could prove rather more positive.

At the end of April, the Department for Transport wrote to every council promoting transport schemes not yet under construction, warning them not to do any more work until there had been a comprehensive spending review later this year.

There remain tough decisions ahead, but this gives us the opportunity to push forward low-cost, sustainable options. Over the past few years we've worked hard to persuade MPs and civil servants that the way we value transport schemes is biased towards new roads. Both the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats agree that redressing this is essential, because better, more affordable solutions are losing out to tired old road schemes.

Budget cuts make smaller schemes more attractive, because you can spread limited resources among more communities.

Take the A14 Ellington to Fen Ditton: £1.3 billion for a new road between Cambridge and Huntingdon. The Department for Transport is faced with a choice between 21 miles of new road and building any other major schemes for a year.

Thankfully, there's a greener, cheaper alternative available. Upgrading the parallel rail freight line would take thousands of lorries off the A14 and leave plenty of money to improve transport across the rest of the country.

Local transport will face similar choices. Funding major road schemes, like the £153m A453, would mean cancelling every other transport scheme in the East Midlands for at least three years, assuming modest cuts in spending. Few would agree that's a good idea. Once again, we're likely to see smaller, more sustainable options being put forward, such as improving the rail line which runs alongside the A453.

We are pursuing the opportunity to see off outdated road schemes and instead get smaller, cheaper yet more effective and low-carbon local transport solutions. ■

Find out more

The best way to keep up-to-date is to follow our campaigners' 'blogs, on our website www.bettertransport.org.uk

Campaigner Report:

Buses at Risk

Campaigner Cat Hobbs outlines the coming threat to buses.

Back in February, Lib Dem MP John Hemming rightly pointed out at Prime Minister's Questions that cuts in spending on buses are symptomatic of a national problem. He was met with laughter from across the Commons, including from the then Prime Minister. That prompted a letter from us, and a written apology from Prime Minister Brown. But the initial response provided what in light of later events we might call a Gillian Duffy moment: MPs' attitudes towards buses had been revealed.

Since then, it's been all change at Westminster, and Mr Hemming's party is now in Government. While laughter about the bus question has subsided, concern that buses could be a vulnerable target for spending cuts has not.

Yet the importance of buses cannot be overstated: two-thirds of public transport journeys are by bus. More than 4.8 billion journeys were made by bus and light rail in England in 2008/09 – hugely surpassing the one billion journeys made by rail.

Buses are particularly important during this recession as a means to access employment, education and training. On average, 25% of households in the UK don't have access to a car, and that will include a large share of people who most need community access. A reliable bus network also allows people the option of leaving their cars behind, which reduces congestion and carbon emissions.

As the battle for buses takes shape, we will focus on three main areas. First, we must protect bus services, including the Bus Service Operators Grant. Keeping concessionary fares but cutting BSOG could leave those with free bus travel without buses to use.

Second, we will continue promote voluntary and statutory bus partnerships between operators and local authorities, which has been successfully implemented in towns as diverse as St. Albans and Nottingham. They are also popular as they put passengers first and improve services.

Third, we will fight to keep Quality Contracts. Voices among the Conservative party have argued against these, but a localist approach to transport should allow councils to choose appropriate ways to improve services, including through Quality Contracts. ■

2 minute ACTION

Help us ensure the new Government makes lower train fares a priority, by visiting the Take Action section of our website, at www.bettertransport.org.uk

A growing Impact

Responding to readers, keeping pace with the issues.

Regular readers will notice some changes at *Impact*, driven in no small part by your feedback. Impact was designed to reach out to our supporters, to demonstrate how our work is producing results, and to thank you for your support in helping us improve transport in the UK.

In the past, we produced regular publications which provided policy and news update for the pre-internet era. But print cannot keep pace with the web (a struggle even for daily newspapers), so those functions have been assumed by our website, or supplanted by online sources.

We have looked for ways to improve Impact without tinkering with our original goals:

- We want to let you know who we are, and what we're doing. So we've raised the profile of our campaigners, and had them speak directly about the campaigns they are working on. We hope that introduction will also serve as an entrée to follow them through our website's blogs.

- We want to give you timely insight into policy details. So our centre-spread features a more in-depth look, which links to still more detailed research again available through our website.

The entire Campaign for Better Transport team contributes to *Impact*, and we value your feedback. Drop us a line to let us know how we're doing, and thanks again for your support.

- We want to provide the same sense of urgency and immediacy that we all feel working daily on transport issues. We hope we have achieved this throughout.

Our work continues to rely on your support, and with big battles looming, that support has never been more urgently anticipated, or deeply appreciated.

Please let us know what you think, and thanks again for your support. ■

***Impact* Volume 4, Issue 2**
Impact is Campaign for Better Transport's supporters magazine, published three times a year.

Jack Haskew, communications director
16 Waterside, 44-48 Wharf Road, London N1 7UX
Email: communications@bettertransport.org.uk
Telephone: 020 7566 6483

Campaign for Better Transport

Registered charity: 1101929. Company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales: 4943428.

Impact is printed on recycled paper.

Better transport, better lives